

IDEOPHONES IN THE KRU LANGUAGE FAMILY

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Abstract: In many grammatical descriptions, ideophones are often ignored. In this paper, I attempt to do a preliminary study of ideophones in the Kru language family (Niger Congo). Though data is limited, I give an overview of various phonological, morphophonological, syntactic and semantic features of this word class, as well as make some initial observations of ideophone use in discourse. Primarily a descriptive study, I try to interact with some major claims in the literature (Blench 2010a; 2010b; Bodomo 2006; Childs 1996; 2001; 2003; 2019; Dingemanse 2012; 2019; Welmers 1973), especially in regard to African languages.

Key words: ideophones, Kru language family, Niger-Congo, reduplication

IDEOPHONES DANS LA FAMILLE KRU

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Résumé : Beaucoup d'études grammaticales ne traitent pas de la question des idéophones. Dans cet article, nous voulons offrir une étude préliminaire des idéophones dans la famille kru (Niger-Congo). Bien que les données soient assez limitées, nous survolerons les caractéristiques principales de cette catégorie grammaticale d'un point de vue phonologique, morphologique, syntaxique et sémantique. Nous ferons aussi quelques observations sur l'emploi des idéophones dans le discours. Il s'agit principalement d'une étude descriptive, mais nous essayerons de commenter les observations déjà faites dans la littérature (Blench 2010a, 2010b; Bodomo 2006; Childs 1996; 2001; 2003; 2019; Dingemanse 2012, 2019; Welmers 1973), surtout en ce qui concerne les langues africaines.

Mots-clés : idéophone, Kru, Niger-Congo, reduplication

1. Introduction

Ideophones are words with expressive content which depict sensory imagery and, at times, convey cognitive information (Dingemans 2012). Beyond this, Childs (2003: 121) claims these forms, quite common in everyday conversations and speech, often play a socio-linguistic role, indicating “social identity” and creating important links between individuals and groups. These highly marked words (phonologically, morphologically, and syntactically) are often ignored or considered as marginal in many grammatical discussions and descriptions.¹ However, they are an integral part in most African languages, including those in the Kru language family, spoken primarily in Côte d’Ivoire and Liberia.

In this paper, I attempt to examine ideophones in over 20 Kru languages and describe their particular and common characteristics, including phonological features, morphological structure, syntactic behavior and semantic domains. I point as well to some of their discourse functions. This initial study, certainly raises other issues of interest as well, for example, to what extent are ideophones shared *within a family* as a whole or a particular sub-group? What might proto-Kru have looked like in this respect?

Though the term *ideophone* seems to have first coined by C.M. Doke (1935),² it was Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther (c.1809–1891), a Yoruba theologian, linguist and translator who first documented this special word category in an African language, including them in his dictionary of Yoruba published in 1852 and using them in his translation of the Bible

¹ Many major descriptions of the family Marchese (1979/1983), as well as studies of individual Kru languages (Egner, Wobé; Guehoun, Lakota Dida; Kokora, Koyo; Saunders, Kouya; Thalmann, Tepo Kru) make little or no mention of ideophones. There is also little mention of ideophones in many otherwise helpful studies of languages in Africa (Creissels 1991; Heine & Nurse 2000). Comparative studies are also rare, as Childs (2001: 64) notes: “Very few studies of African ideophones... have looked beyond a single language”.

² See (Welmers 1974), among many others.

into Yoruba.³ It was nearly a century later, Doke, who worked primarily on Bantu languages, offered a now oft-quoted definition of an ideophone as “a vivid representation of **an idea in sound**”.

Many have noted the difficulty of providing an acceptable definition, both universally and language-specifically. As Welmers has observed, “everyone seems to recognize that some words are ideophones, but no one finds it easy to define an ideophone with any precision” (1973: 460). Routledge’s “Dictionary of language and linguistics” (Busmann 1996) defines the term as:

Generally, an onomatopoeic (onomatopoeia) representation of a concept, often consisting of reduplicated syllables and not adhering to the phonotactic structure of the given language.

These authors go on to provide some examples (quoting Timyan 1976) from Baoule, an Ivorian language of the Kwa family, distantly related to Kru:

... (a) sound concepts [keteketekete] ‘a running elephant’, [foooooo] ‘the laughter of an elephant’; (b) visual concepts [gudugudu] ‘something large and round’, [mlāmlālā] ‘something large and fat’...

Indeed, ideophones are not limited to Africa, making up large word classes in such diverse languages as Korean, Japanese, and Tamil. In his work on universal grammatical categories, “Parts of speech” (1985), Paul Schachter proposes a slightly more grammatically oriented definition:⁴

- An ideophone is a member of a set of words that
- are phonologically distinguishable from other words in a language
 - are often onomatopoeic, and
 - form one or more syntactic classes or subclasses, most typically adverbial.

³ Blench (2010a) cites Koelle (1854) re Crowther. Crowther may be the first translator in Africa (or worldwide) to use ideophones while translating the Bible into his mother tongue. Through many decades ideophones were ignored or not considered “real words” by European missionaries and so did not appear in many Bible translations. Today, translators are strongly encouraged to use ideophones in appropriate contexts (Noss 1988; Kenmogne & Zogbo 2014).

⁴ Cited in SIL “Glossary of Linguistic Terms” (Anderson et al. (eds.) 2003). Voeltz & Klian-Hatz (2001: 2) also declare the ideophone a “universal category”.

We will return to many of these proposed features below. More recently Dingemanse (2012: 654) has described ideophones as “...*marked* words depictive of sensory imagery found in many of the worlds’ languages”.

Dingemanse’s definition and his subsequent discussions provide an excellent jumping off point for reflection on ideophones in general. There is indeed something highly *marked* about this category of words. While Doke uses the term “representation” to describe this word class, Dingemanse describes ideophones as *depictions* which “are special in the way they signify their referents” (Dingemanse 2012: 655). Using examples from Siwu, a Togo-Remnant language, he clearly shows how this word category distinguishes itself from other grammatical categories in that language. Thus, in Siwu there is a *verb* meaning ‘to be walking unevenly and out of balance’, but there is also an *ideophone*, *gbadara-gbadara*, with roughly the same meaning. As Dingemanse (2012: 655) points out, “the former DESCRIBES the gait whereas the latter DEPICTS it”. He notes that the ideophone constitutes, in fact, “a little performance”, inviting listeners to “look at” (imagine? recreate?) a given situation, as if they are actually experiencing it. In our opinion, this latter observation captures the very essence of ideophones and the role they play in human interaction. Primarily they have an *expressive* and *performative* function.⁵ As some have characterized them, they are indeed “picture words” or to come back to Doke, “an idea in sound”. This performative (or “dramaturgic function”, Voelz and Kilian-Hatz, 2001) aspect helps us understand why it is often difficult to elicit these words in classical linguistic research settings. Kunene, speaking about Sesotho puts it well (2001: 189): “By its very nature, the ideophone demands the presence to each other of the communicating parties, namely the speaker and the listener. That is the essence of performance,

⁵ Junod (1938, cited in Finnegan 1976: 67) perceives the same immediacy of these words to the current speech act: “Sensation is immediate and is immediately translated into a word, or a sound, a sound which is so appropriate, so fitting, that one sees the animal moving, hears the sound produced, or feels oneself the very sensation expressed.”

and the ideophone is a performative speech act par excellence...” In our experience, even native speakers of languages which attest many ideophones have balked when asked to produce them, noting: “if you want to describe something with an ideophone, you have to see it first!”. As Childs also notes, “Ideophones are quintessentially social, the mark of local identity and solidarity” (2001: 70), another reason why linguists coming from the outside have not easily been able to elicit or document these special word forms.⁶

Returning to Dingemans’s short definition of ideophones, including “sensory imagery”, we note this seems to satisfactorily describe many ideophones in the Kru language family. But we note another dimension as well – a certain *cognitive* component – which might be part of an even wider definition.⁷ Indeed, Doke’s initial “*ideo*-phone”, literally “*idea*-sound”, leaves room for virtually every type of ideophone I have identified in Kru.

As we examine our data, we can ask what are features of ideophones in Kru across the family and what, if any, are specific characteristics in individual languages.

2. Ideophones in Kru

2.1. Kru languages and data

Kru languages are spoken primarily in a huge forest region spreading from south-eastern Liberia into south-western Côte d’Ivoire. However, a significant diaspora exists with small Kru communities dotting the West African coastline where, over a century ago, “crewmen” stopped and set up settlements. Given recent civil wars in both countries, today Kru speakers can be found throughout Europe and the US as well as

⁶ In several articles, Childs discusses the difficulty of eliciting members of this word class and notes that ideophones (and perhaps even its grammatical category) can be lost (1996: 83), especially in contexts of urbanization. See Childs (2001) and Blench (2010).

⁷ Dingemans includes this feature in his presentation of the semantics of ideophones (2012: 660).

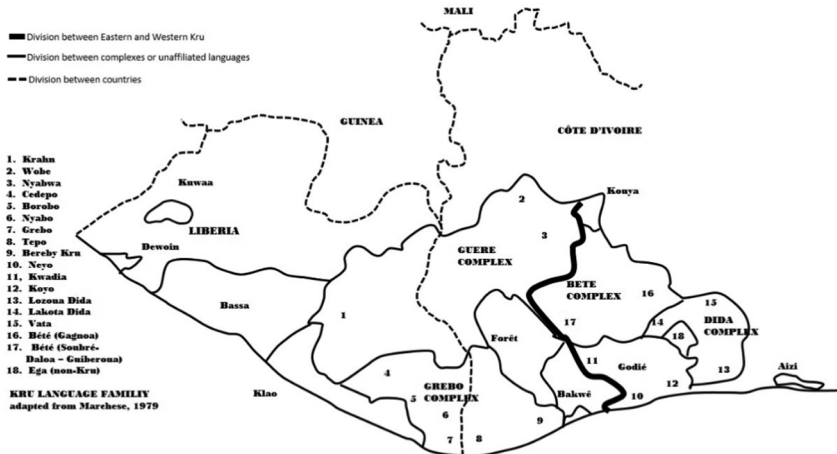


Figure 1. Map of the Kru language family

many other countries around the world. Figure 1 presents a map of the Kru language family.

Though its exact placement within Niger-Congo is still debated (Blench & Williamson 2000) and much research remains to be carried out, the family is divided into two main branches, west and east, as seen below (Delafosse 1904; Marchese 1983a; 1989). In this study, I mark language examples as (W) or (E), to help in reflecting on the role “genetics” might play in forms or features of ideophones. I have only very limited data from what are known as the Kru isolates: Kuwaa, in Liberia and Aizi, in Côte d’Ivoire.⁸

As far as I know, ideophones are attested throughout the Kru language family. In this study, which comes from a variety of published and unpublished sources, I have been able to identify this word type in the following languages listed in Table 1. Due to lack of extensive research on Kru languages, our data base is quite eclectic, representing

⁸ In (Marchese 1983a), a third northern Kru isolate is mentioned, but a recent study by Vogler (2019) has convincingly shown that Seme (in Burkina Faso) is not Kru.

some published and unpublished materials (often hard to locate) and several examples obtained through personal communication. For most languages, there is only one source, as noted in the Table 1. When multiple sources exist, the precise source is marked in the text.

Table 1

Kru languages where ideophones are attested and sources of the data

Western	
Bakwé	Leidenfrost and Bakwé team
Bassa	D. Slager
Glaro	Lesley Wolfe and Bàrĩ Klé Eugene (p.c.)
Grebo	G. Innes
Klao	Nyanatee Sayon (p.c.)
Krahn	Sauder and Wright
Nyabwa	Helen Wilson
Southern Guere	San Honore and Taha Theodore (p.c.)
Tepo Kru	P. Thamann
Wobé	I. Egner
Eastern	
Daloa Bete	Gnoléba Zogbo
Divo	Dida Akessi Dakoury (p.c.)
Gbāwāl	Gnaly Kpata (p.c.)
Guebie	Hannah Sande
Guibéroua Bete	H.-M. Werle
Godié	L. Marchese (field notes)
Kouya	P. Saunders
Koyo	P. Kokora
Lakota Dida	A. Guehoun
Neyo	C. Grah
Niambre Bete	M. Ouraga (p.c.)
Vata	P. Vogler
Yokoboue Dida	Acka Pascal (p.c.)
Isolate	
Kuwaa	L.Z. Marchese (field notes, speaker Edward Payne from Golita, Liberia, 1978)

The widespread nature of ideophones is not surprising, since already in (1973: 459), Welmers claimed:

In virtually every Niger-Congo language, as well as typically in Nilo-Saharan languages and at least in the languages of the Chadic branch of Afro-Asiatic, but apparently not in the Koisian languages, there is a fairly large group of words now generally known as “ideophones”.

This speaks strongly in favor of the possibility that Proto-Niger Congo, as well as Proto-Kru, had, at some stage, a grammatical category **ideophone*, though it is not easy to reconstruct members of such a class. See also Childs (2019).

In what follows I attempt to describe basic characteristics of ideophones in Kru based on phonological and morphophonological, syntactic and semantic features. Finally, before our concluding remarks, I will comment on what I have learned to date on discourse use of ideophones, with limited observations on their distribution and historical origins.

3.2. Phonological features and morphophonological shape of ideophones in Kru

Because it is difficult to speak of phonological features without referring to structure, I combine this discussion below. Also, because onomatopoeia is often part of proposed universal definitions, I will first discuss this issue. As this paper progresses, readers can evaluate for themselves when and if this notion is pertinent. Next, an overview of basic morphophonological shape is presented, followed by a more detailed description of phonological features.

Kru languages typically have up to 30 contrastive consonants, including *p, t, c, k, kp, kʷ, b, d, j, g, gb, gʷ*, implosive *ɓ* and *ɗ* (the latter being rare), *w, y, l* (with a flap [r] variant), *m, n, ɲ, ŋ, ŋʷ*. Vowel systems vary between 9 and 13 vowels, with various kinds of vowel harmony sets based on a retracted, non-retracted distinction. Western languages attest contrastive nasalized vowels as well. Kru languages

have three or four contrastive tones and various modifications (Marchese 1979; 1989).⁹

3.2.1. On the notion of onomatopoeia and ideophones in Kru

ONOMATOPOEIA is mentioned in many of the universal as well as individual language definitions of the category of words called ideophones. Webster defines this term first as “the naming of a thing or action by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it (such as buzz, hiss)”, and secondarily as “the use of words whose sound suggests the sense” (Merriam-Webster.com 2022). According to this traditional definition, many ideophones in Kru are onomatopoeic or “imitations” of sounds in nature.

Across Kru, there is a wealth of data proving this point (1)–(3).¹⁰

(1) Krahn (W)

:*gbuu*: ‘sound of thunder gunsho’

:*gwiaa*: ‘sound of door scraping or of something being dragged’

'*gblu* ‘sound of something being cut or chopped (such as a cornstalk)’

'*gbo* ‘sound of cutlass hitting someone’

:*hau* ‘rushing sound’

⁹ In this paper, a major challenge has been to quote various researchers since they use a wide variety of phonetic symbols and orthographies. I have most often retained orthography of those cited, but in some cases have removed tone markings and reverted to a numbering system, with 1 being high tone and 4 being low (or 1 and 3 in languages where there are only 3 tones). These are placed to the right of the examples. In many Ivorian languages, the Institut de Linguistique appliquée has proposed a system based on punctuation with an apostrophe before a syllable indicating high tone, a hyphen, a low tone, and no marking, a mid (or mid high and mid low) tone. Krahn orthography developed for Liberia, is especially unique and at times challenging, as in the above examples where a colon (:) represents low tone. In that orthography *or* refers to *ɔ*, *ih* and *eh* to *ɪ* and *ɛ*. Most often I have tried to harmonize. Syllable or word final *n* is not a consonant in Kru but indicates the preceding vowel is nasalized, a distinctive feature in most Western languages.

¹⁰ In this and following, examples cited come from various sources, but analyses and comments on these examples, unless otherwise specified, represent my own analyses of the data.

(2) Glaro¹¹ (W)

- a. He hit him on the head with a stick **gbòó**.
 b. He slapped him on the mouth **gbàóó**.
 c. He chews (food) **chaochao**. ‘smacks’
 d. He blood flowed **sròóó**. ‘gushed out’
 e. **kpù** the coconut fell down. ‘on the ground’
 f. **gwlòù**, the house fell down. ‘sound of something large falling down or over’

(3) Grebo (W)

- tú* ‘of the fall of large object with a crash, a loud noise’
hóó ‘of liquid gushing out profusely’
siúú ‘(of the sound of falling water) with a splash’
tá ‘(of liquid falling) one drop’
kpú ‘with a bang’
pá ‘sound of a sharp blow’
tig ‘of diving without a big splash’
wíá ‘slashing with a gash’
sósó ‘sound of rice, sand being poured out, trembling, shivering’

(4) Godié (E)

- vuuu* ‘sound of eagle sweeping down for prey’

While many ideophones in Kru have an onomatopoeic element, it must be remembered, as noted by Welmers (1973: 462), there is a great deal of subjectivity when trying to determine what is onomatopoeic in a language. He notes, “Ideophones in any language are, like other forms, part of the community-accepted lexicon of *arbitrary associations* between sound and meaning” (1973: 464). As we get into semantic categorization where ideophones signal abstract notions such as “completely” or where they have discourse function (signaling end of unit, story climax, etc.),

¹¹ It is interesting to note in our data base, many of these onomatopoeic ideophones have a back *o* sound. Obviously much more data is needed and more work needs to be done in the area of *sound symbolism* and *iconicity*.

ideophones seem to have no onomatopoeic link whatsoever, though it remains to be seen if certain sounds or tones are in any way iconic.

3.2.2. Morphophonological shape

Along with onomatopoeia, a characteristic imitative sound of nature, some definitions of ideophones often mention “reduplication”, a common feature of many ideophones in Kru. However, a careful study of the data reveals that this cannot either be *a defining feature of this grammatical class*. First, we note many other words in Kru languages attest reduplication, including simple lexical items, nominalized nouns, reciprocal verbs, etc.¹² Also, Kru ideophones have a wide variety of shapes. Thus, alongside reduplicated ideophones (units being repeated twice), there are many one “morpheme” or “one-unit” ideophones, as well as those composed of three repetitive or reduplicated forms. Further, to characterize these words as mono-, di-, or tri-syllabic does not describe the data, since many reduplicated and triplicated forms have 2 syllables per repeated unit. Also, many forms which are considered single unit ideophones can be analyzed as being made up of two syllables. Below are examples from both Western and Eastern Kru showing various ideophonic shapes.

3.2.2.1. Single element ideophones. Note the most common syllable structure in Kru is CV, but V, CVV and CLV are also very common, where CLV often acts as one syllable (Marchese 1983a; 1989). As seen below ideophones can contain any of these syllable structures, though CV and CVV appear to be the most common. In our data base, no ideophone begins with a single V syllable.

¹² In Daloa Bete, ‘cheek’ is *gbogbo* and ‘duck’ is *-labhalabha* (G. Zogbo 2005: 118, 160). Guehoun (1993) notes reduplication is used to express intensification in Lakota Dida: *ɪ bate bate jaalwa* ‘I looked for the person with insistence’; *ɔ lɪɪ lɪɪ* ‘he spoke with insistence’. See Marchese (1983) for examples in many Kru languages of nominalized verbs and reciprocals formed with reduplication.

(5) Nyabwa (W)

CV

"ce 'very cold'*vo* 'no where' (or sense of shock)

CVV

"fia 'completely'*"bhav* 'quick heartbeat'*-wɔɔ* 'slowly, without hurrying'*-daan* 'a little time'

(6) Krahn (W)

CV

'gbo 'cutlass hitting someone'*ba* 'something breaking'

CVV

:hau 'rushing sound'

CVV

'gbai 'not at all'*bou* 'wide open'*gbou* 'unmoving, no strength'

CLV

glaan' 'all of a sudden'*'gblu* 'cutting, chopping'

(7) Grebo (W)

CVV

boo 22 'brightly, glowingly'*fãã* 33 'of bursting into flames, of brightness'*kpeɔ* 21 'of something shooting out suddenly'*nia* 333 'quickly'

(8) Daloa Bete (E, G. Zogbo 2005: 90)

CVV(V)

foo 33 'very light'*gööö* 43 'fixed, sitting tight'

(9) Koyo (E)

CV

ci 'object cut into two parts'*ca* 'the jump of an animal' (like a cat)

3.2.2.2. Reduplicated ideophones (element is repeated twice). What follows are cases of ideophones exhibiting reduplication, where a syllable (CV, CVV or CLV) or longer segments resembling words are repeated exactly. In our data base the limit to reduplication seems to be two syllables. In many cases, the tone is also reduplicated.

(10) Krahn (W, Sauder & Wright 2000: 135)

zoa zoa 'long, high stepping'
'kpan kpan 'completely, packed' (no room left)
duo duo 'silence'

(11) Grebo (W)

toto 33 'fairly hot'
feafea 3333 'of the sound of feet dragging on the ground'
bloblo 2 'wide awake'
gyɔplɔgyɔplɔ 4141 'fidgeting'

(12) Bakwe (W)

klakla 'strongly bound'
duedue 'going very far'
cekeceke 'very wet'

(13) Bassa (W)

fùà-fùá 'trouble'
tɔ́ún-tɔ́ún 'enough'
wàdàwàdà 'quickly'

(14) Vata (E)

tíkítíkí 'not at all' *ń si tíkítíkí* 'I'm not laughing at all.'
mlómló 'not at all' *nà dlá mlómló* 'Don't beat him at all.'
plìplì 'quietly' *ò nò zè plìplì* 'He does it quietly.'
gṵgṵ 'quiet' *ɔ nṵ nṵ gṵgṵ lṵbì* 'He does his work quietly.'

(15) Koyo (E, Kokora 1976: 63)

kapakapa 'doing things in a crazy manner' (dirty tricks)
kwlakwla 'at all'

(16) Daloa Bete (E, G. Zogbo 2005: 90)

fɔkɔfɔkɔ 3333 'light'
ghlighli 11 'quickly'

(17) Guibéroua Bete (E, G. Zogbo 2005: 54)

pälepäle 2121 'quietly, in order'

(18) Neyo (E, Grah 1983: 296)

aweee 2333 'sound of pleasure'
bèèè 333 'impatience'

(19) Kuwaa (Kru isolate. LZ field notes)

wolowolo 'ever / never / forever'

3.2.2.3. Ideophones with triplication. As with reduplicated forms, the repeated segment can be a monosyllabic or disyllabic. Very often the tone reduplicates as well.

(20) Nyabwa (W)

kplokplokplo 'until, on and on'
gbligbligbli 'single file'
plupluplu 'action de fruit falling from tree one by one'
riberiberibe 'action of rolling on the ground'

(21) Krahn (W)

'wien 'wien 'wien 'jingle-jingle-jingle'
:mu :mu :mu 'sound of beating (rice in mortar)'

(22) Kouya (E)

bidi-bidi-bidi [bidibidibidi] 'disorder'
lhlh 'totally, completely'
cɔcɔcɔ [còcòcò] 'successively'

(23) Lakota Dida (E)

kókàkók ‘always’

(24) Daloa Bete (E)

plupluplu 333 ‘in a scattered fashion’*papapa 111* ‘completely’*kèkèkè 222* ‘firmly’*kèkèkè 444* ‘a lot’ (in greeting, follows *-ayo*)

(25) Guibéroua Bete (E)

lilili ‘completely, definitively, never’

Note that in reduplicated and triplicated forms, sometimes the repeated unit can stand on its own. For example, *kò*, *gbě* or *li* in Bete in the forms above are also found in isolation. To date no examples of quadruplication have been attested in our data base.¹³ Unlimited repetition is known to occur in greetings, conveying intensity. Thus, in the typical Eastern Kru greeting, *ayokakaka* (Godié, my fieldnotes; Daloa Bete *-ayo kèkèkè*), in the ideophone meaning ‘a lot’, the repetitive element can be repeated indefinitely, though three is the most frequently heard form.

3.2.2.4. Ideophones with unusual shapes. While almost all ideophones show some form of reduplication, in a few cases words with *two dissimilar syllables* seem to qualify as ideophones.

(26) Grebo (W)

doeðe 33333 ‘quietly’*gbodo 41* ‘large gulps’*kyudu 33* ‘of jumping remaining on’*bleble* or *bleble 33* ‘with a flapping motion’

¹³ One exception is Niabre *titititi* (all high tone) ‘very black’, though this may be perceived as reduplication of the segment *titi*.

(27) Krahn (W)

:gboru ‘sound of joyful noise’

:gbli:gli ‘sound of hurrying’

(28) Glaro (W)

a. *The plate fell down* **kpvkloo**.

b. *The coins fell down* **kpanklaan**.

(29) Gbawält (E, Gnaly Kpata)

titimati ‘true’

3.2.2.5 Concluding remarks on morphophonological shape. A survey of these forms raises the question of whether these forms constitute one or several phonological words. Despite variations in orthography (some put a space between reduplicated forms), it seems likely that the forms do constitute *one phonological word*. No element can be inserted in between the elements making up an ideophone. Phonological features such as loudness or voice intensity seem to affect the entire word and not parts of it. Further, as we will see later, syntactically the ideophone acts as a unit, being front shifted for emphasis, for example. But more research is needed in this area.

This section shows that though onomatopoeia and reduplication are characteristic of many ideophones, not all ideophones exhibit these features and thus figure only in a limited way in our general definition of ideophones in Kru. Our findings confirm, however, what many have observed, i.e. that ideophones make use of sounds and phonological features which are outside the standard phonemic inventory of the languages in which they occur and show many unusual sound features (Childs 2003), as will be seen below.

3.3. Phonological features associated with Kru ideophones

Welmers (1973: 465) suggests that it is primarily phonological considerations that help to identify ideophones in a given language, and only secondarily a rather undefined set of semantic “peculiarities”.

Childs (2003: 119) makes a detailed list of possible phonological features associated with African ideophones including:

- a raised or lowered register,
- a rapidly modulated or exaggerated register range,
- phonation types not part of the matrix language,
- overly short or long duration,
- a fast or slow speaking rate,
- pauses setting off the ideophone from the rest of the sentence, initially, medially or finally,
- phones not belonging to the regular phonemic inventory.

While all of these phonological features may affect ideophones in Kru, some are particularly evident. These include phones and/or phoneme distribution outside the regular phonemic inventories of a given language, non-phonemic vowel lengthening at the end of ideophones, and an exaggerated or affected speech register (loudness and special stress).

3.3.1. Ideophones with phones not part of the regular phonemic inventory

As in many languages worldwide, ideophones may use phones which are not part of the standard phonemic inventory. A startling example is nasalized vowels in Eastern Kru ideophones. While Western Kru languages attest nasal vowel phonemes, Eastern languages generally do not.¹⁴ But in ideophones, nasalized vowels do occur in this group.

(30) Godié (E)

kpaĩ ‘a lot, a whole bunch’

(31) Daloa Bete (E)

kpaóón [kpaoõ] ‘boom (sound of gun)’

teintein ‘a lot’

¹⁴ In Eastern Kru, nasal vowels occur in particular phonological or morpho-phonological contexts. For example, when a nasal consonant is dropped, synchronically or diachronically, a nasalized vowel results.

(32) Guébie

<i>kěěě</i>	‘zoom!’
<i>jǎǎ 2424</i>	‘for a long time’
<i>sǎǎǎ 444</i>	‘angry/fuming noise’

For Guébié, Sandé (p.c.) also reports that the fricative [ʒ] occurs in an onomatopoeic word *ěǎě 44* ‘quack’ (the noise of a duck), which shows two non-phonemic segments, a fricative and a nasalized vowel.

Another area where non-phonemic patterns occur in ideophones concerns flap *r*. In most Kru languages the flap *r* is a conditioned variant of /l/ and almost always restricted to a non-initial position in the syllable: CrV. In both Godié (E) and Nyabwa (W) ideophones, however, this sound occurs in non-standard positions.

In Godié, flap *r* is a non-distinctive phonetic realization after alveolar consonants, but in at least one ideophone, it occurs after a bilabial in a non-standard syllable and/or word pattern.

(33) Godié (E)

<i>prrrrrrrr</i>	‘shining very brightly’
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In Nyabwa, the flap *r* normally does not occur word or syllable-initially, but it does occur in that position in at least one ideophone.

(34) Nyabwa (W)

<i>riberiberibe</i>	‘action of rolling on the ground’ ¹⁵
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A similar phenomenon appears to occur in Bakwe.

(35) Bakwe (W)

<i>ruupku</i>	‘a lot’
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This special use of flap *r* may occur throughout Kru but as yet the data is too limited to make any generalizations.

¹⁵ Helen Wilson suggests that the initial *r* seems to imitate each turn.

3.3.2. Overly long duration (as determined by context)

Example (33) shows a case of a long consonant being used in a way that does not conform in any way to syllable pattern constraints in Godié. Also, vowels in Kru may be elongated, this is a special feature of ideophones in African languages (Noss 1988; Childs 2003). In Kru there is no phonemic long-short vowel distinction,¹⁶ but elongating (some might say, reduplicating) a final vowel of an ideophone adds not only a special sound effect, but adds meaning as well, usually some type of intensification. Thus, in Godié the ideophone *pi* gets elongated to insist on an early morning event. Indeed, the longer (and higher) the vowel, the earlier in the morning it is.

(36) Godié (E)

zukupi pi 221

‘early in the morning’

zukupi püüüüü 221

‘**very** early in the morning’

(37) Niabré (E)

kuuuu ‘a long time’ (varies with *ki*)

(38) Bakwé (W)

-fuuun ‘feeling poorly’

pruuu ‘noise of what is thrown’ (related to *prugbati* ‘arrow’)

Sauder & Wright (2003: 135) report for Krahn that elongating the final vowel of the ideophone *bou* can express how far wide open a space might extend.

(39) Krahn (W)

*An-a: gle :ne ken dih **bhou !***

I-POSS farm Is all around **open**

‘My field is clear, **OPEN!**’

¹⁶ When long vowels are heard in Kru languages, they are almost always a function of a combination of register tones, for example, Godié *boo* ‘bowl’ (high+mid tone).

Innes (1969) describes a similar phenomenon in Grebo, where elongating the vowel somehow underlines or intensifies the description. Thus, in the following sentences using the ideophone for “depressing”, “dull” or “gloomy”, elongating the final /u/ takes the ideophone “to the next degree”.

(40) Grebo (W)

kpuũũ 2 ‘of biting severely’
dię nu nɔ neuu 22 1 2 222 ‘the weather is (really¹⁷) dull’
sidię mlina dɔ ne kpuua 22 22 1 2 211 ‘the snake bit’

This elongating intensifying phenomenon which establishes otherwise unprecedented word shapes seems to occur across Kru.¹⁸

3.3.3. Exaggerated (loud) speech

Ideophones in Kru are often pronounced in a louder tone of voice (represented below in capital letters), at a faster or slower rhythm, or in an especially exaggerated way. Thus, when reacting to a comment by someone as to the seriousness of a situation, an ideophone can be pronounced very loudly and deliberately. For example, in a Godié folktale when Eagle descends quickly to attack Viper, the ideophone *Kpaaan!* stands out above all other words in the story in terms of loudness and strength. Also, in Godié, in everyday conversation, if something is said to be “too much”, a person might respond with

¹⁷ Gloss is mine.

¹⁸ This morphophonological process of vowel lengthening is not restricted to ideophones.

In Godié and other languages, the welcoming *Aduuu*, can be lengthened indefinitely to express extreme happiness. The final vowel of the borrowed time adverb “jusqu’a” is also elongated to express a long time. Sometimes a vowel is lengthened internally, to express emphasis. For example, in Godié, compare:

- (i) *ayoka* ‘Greetings! (normal unaffected speech)’
- (ii) *ayoooooka* ‘Greetings! (I am soooo happy to see you’ or ‘Thank you soooo much)’

a single ideophone, pronounced very loudly (expressed by capitals below):

(41) Godié (E)
KPAÍ! ‘(Yes, I agree, it’s) **too much!**’

Similarly, while in normal speech the word “always” would be pronounced in a natural rhythmic way, if the speaker wants to emphasize how much this behavior *always* occurs, s/he might say in a loud voice (42),

(42) Godié (E)
KO-KO-KO 131 ‘Always!’

Here the speaker slows down the pronunciation of this word, separating out each syllable (with a slight pause) and saying each one in a loud voice. This might be the oral equivalent of writing in bold in a printed text.

It is reported that in Hausa (Paul Newman cited in Welmers 1973: 467) ideophones are accompanied by “expressive intonation” or “expressive tone and stress”. I note, for example, in the above example, the range of the tone seems wider (highs are higher and lows are lower) than in normal speech.

3.3.4. Violations of vowel harmony

Childs suggests in many languages ideophones are not affected by phonological rules. To date in this domain I have only been able to consider rules of vowel harmony. While most ideophones in Kru respect vowel harmony constraints based on tongue root position (Marchese 1979; 1989; Zogbo 2011), there is at least one example from Bakwe where this does not appear to be the case (43).

(43) Bakwe (W)
-piseεε ‘sound of two objects which separate all at once’

However, across the family, there are many more examples of vowel harmony being respected, where ideophones show identical vowels or vowels from the same vowel harmony set (retracted or non-retracted vowels). A bigger data base may eventually allow us to say more about this phenomenon.

3.3.5 Tone patterns

The data on tone on Kru ideophones is still inconclusive, since in printed materials many Ivorian Kru languages only mark syllable-initial and at times syllable final tone. Thus, little is yet known about the regularity or any unusual features of tone patterning of ideophones in the Kru family or any particular intonation features besides loudness. Also, systematic semantic correlations have yet to be established in the Kru languages examined.¹⁹

However, a cursory overview shows that repeated homogenous tone characterizes many (but not all) ideophones.²⁰

(44) Klao (W)

pia pia pia ‘flash of lightning’

(45) Nyabwa (W)

fofo 33 ‘quickly’

fɔfɔ 33 ‘of smarting, stinging, hotness’

¹⁹ Finnegan (1976: 71) notes for example, in Yoruba a correlation between high tone and smallness, and between low toned words with plosives and the notion of slow movement or huge size. Bodomo (2006: 206) notes a similar correlation in Dagara between low-toned ideophones referring to “heavier, longer, or fatter entities”, with high-toned ones referring to “lighter, shorter and thinner entities”. This clearly constitutes an area for further research.

²⁰ For Dagaare, a Gur language, for example, Bodomo (2006: 205–206) notes that ideophones are usually produced on “only one tone quality, either low or high, on the entire stretch of the three-syllable word”. This is definitely *not* the case in the Kru family.

fufu 33 ‘strong wind, cars passing fast’
"fiafia 11 ‘slowly, without hurrying’

(46) Krahn (W)

:*kla :kla* 44 ‘step by step’
 :*mu :mu :mu* 444 ‘sound of pounding’
 '*wien 'wien 'wien* 111 ‘ding, ding, ding’

(47) Daloa Bete (E)

-*plɔplɔ* 44 ‘neat/clean’
 "*papapa* 111 ‘completely (eating everything)’
këkëkë 222 ‘firmly’
 -*këkëkë* 444 ‘a lot’ (in greeting, -*ayo*...)

Ideophones with varying tones appear, impressionistically at least, to be fewer in number, but they do occur, for example, in Daloa Bete, '*yekëyekë* 2422 ‘solid, not wobbly’, Guebié *ɲɔɔ* 1313 ‘for a long time’ as well as many examples from Grebo (48).²¹

(48) Grebo

hoho 23 ‘crying bitterly’
kyokyo 12 ‘movement of eyes darting’
plapla 12 ‘of fidgeting’
gbodo 41 ‘large gulps’

As noted above in several examples, *excessively long* and/or *high* tone is associated with intensity. It has also been observed that in some languages (e.g. Grebo, Glaro), low tone seems more frequent in a general count of ideophones in the lexicon. However, such tonal correlations, semantic or of other sorts, are clearly an area for further research.

²¹ Childs (2015: 300) notes in some African languages “uneven patterns of tone” may reflect irregular motion, as seems to be the case in these Grebo examples.

3.3.6. Pause setting off the ideophone

Childs notes that phonologically ideophones may be set off from the rest of a sentence by pause. Welmers (1973) suggests this is one of the major identifying characteristics of ideophones. See also Bodomo (2006: 207). This is true of Kru ideophones, but may be a fact more tied to syntax than phonology. (See the discussion on syntactic features below.) Interestingly, in writing examples, Sauder (n.d.: 136) marks some ideophones off by commas (49). Thus we might think of (49a) as containing three propositions, and (49b), two.

(49) Krahn (W, Sauder n.d.: 136)

- a. ɔ *da* *daa,* ***duo duo,*** *nyɔ* *:se-'* *'worn.*
 they call DUR SILENCE person NEG hear.
 'They called and called, but nobody answered.'
- b. *'Yu* *'ya* *dih:* *tu* *bo,* ***:kla :kla.***
 man AUX climb tree PART **one step at a time**
 'The man climbed the tree one step at a time.'

Kpata (p.c.) also records a pause before part of an ideophone is repeated in a story introduction (50).

(50) Gbāwalt (E)

- A* *'pa* *jlib* ***'titimati....mati.***
 we throw story IDEO
 'Let's tell a story... a real one.'

This is a feature few have paid attention to or transcribed, and so would also warrant further study.

4. Syntactic features of the Kru ideophone

It may be that many Western researchers have skipped over ideophones in part because they do not correspond directly to any known

grammatical category in European languages. Defining them as a grammatical category can be a challenge. Many a linguist and/or native speaker is simply tempted to say “you know them when you see them!” (McFarland 2010: 235). In this section, I attempt to describe the syntactic behavior or defining characteristics of what appears to be a true grammatical category in Kru.

4.1. Autonomous uninflected words

In Kru, ideophones are *lexically autonomous* and, in some sense, *frozen forms*. Thus, unlike other parts of speech, they do not inflect or agree in any way with words in their immediate or distant context. Though occurring most often in clauses of various types, they can constitute an *independent utterance*, as a remark or an answer to a question, as seen in (41) and (42). They are found in everyday speech and conversation and well attested in more structured genres (histories, folktales, personal narratives, etc.).²²

To justify this grammatical class in any given language, we need to distinguish it from other classes in that language. In Dingemans’s discussion of ideophones mentioned above, he shows that ideophones in Siwu are *distinct from verbs*, though they may convey semantically related notions. Similarly in Kru, in the following examples from Southern Guéré, a clause made up of a pronoun subject and a qualificative, adjectival verb is followed by a *grammatically optional ideophone* DEPICTING and INTENSIFYING that quality (51).

(51) Southern Guéré (W)

- a. ε *kpe* *blibli*.
 it black IDEO
 ‘It’s very black.’

²² Clearly a domain for further research is to determine what genres have higher numbers of ideophones. Are there genres with no ideophones? Do ideophones occur in procedurals, proverbs or songs?

- b. ε *zan* *i* *greeeee.*
 it red PART IDEO
 ‘It’s very red.’
- c. ε *pru* *'puuuuuuuu.*
 it white IDEO
 ‘It’s very white.’

Thus, at the very least, we see that ideophones are distinct from verbs. Examples from other Kru languages are similar and confirm this observation.

4.2. Two major ideophone types

A cursory study of Kru ideophones in sentences reveals that there appear to be **two distinct kinds of ideophones**: (i) those which truly “depict” an event as in (51) and those which, (ii) while still drawing attention through marked sound patterns, play an *obligatory grammatical role* in the sentence. Frequency-wise, the first kind of ideophone is the most common, and might be seen as representing its most basic use.

4.2.1. Depicting or adverbial-type ideophones

Welmers (1973: 461), among others, notes that ideophones are often associated (or confused?) with adverbs, being described as “descriptive” or “onomatopoeic adverbials”. Indeed, there are several syntactic similarities between adverbials and ideophones, including position in the clause and focusing strategies. There are however some significant differences as well.

4.2.1.1. Position in the clause. The position of ideophones in the clause depends on its syntactic function. Generally, however, in Kru the unmarked position of ideophones is **sentence final**, a slot that collocates with temporal and manner adverbs qualifying or in some way “depicting” an event or state.

(52) Krahn (W) (Sauder & Wright 2000: 135)

- a. ɔ *na* *zoa zoa*.
 he walks IDEO
 ‘He walks **with high (or long) steps.**’
- b. Nyɔ^{+23} :*dao'*, *mo-*: *'yi* :*gwlor* :*dao* *'kpan kpa*.
 people DEM they:EMP fill town that IDEO
 ‘Those people filled the town **completely.**’
- c. *'Yu* *'ya* *dih:* *tu* *bo,* *:kla* :*kla*.
 man climbed the tree PART IDEO
 The man climbed the tree, **step-step-step.**’

(53) Guiberoua Bete (E)

- a. *'Na* *nɔlɔɔ*, ɔ *ye* ɔ *'bhele* *më* *'lulu*.
 my wife she AUX her country go IDEO
 ‘My wife returned home **definitively.**’
- b. *N'n* *'lehbɔ* *'lulu*.
 I.NEG hit-him **never**
 ‘I **never** hit him.’

(54) Daloa Bete (E, G. Zogbo 2005: 215, 120)

- a. *Sika* *su* *ma"* *lagble'ε* *plupluplu*.
 rice scatter there field:LOC IDEO
 ‘The rice is in the field **scattered.**’
- b. *Nikpeyi* *la* *wv* *"kɔmv"* *plɔplɔ*.
 man DEM is dressed IDEO
 ‘That man is well-dressed **neat/clean.**’
- c. *Tape* *wv* *li* *"bhuokpö* *"mö* *"ghëghëghé"*.
 Tape is ??? everything in IDEO
 ‘Tape is into everything **everywhere.**’

²³ In Krahn and a few other Liberian orthographies, a plus sign (+) designates a plural form, which native speakers read automatically.

It is interesting to note that in all the examples above, the ideophones are *optional*. If the ideophone is removed, all the sentences remain grammatically correct and constitute complete independent sentences.

It must be admitted that in Kru it is at times difficult to distinguish adverbs from ideophones,²⁴ because they often occupy *the same syntactic position*. Thus, in his invaluable Grebo-English dictionary, Innes (1969) seems to label as adverbs certain words which look very much like and might well qualify as ideophones. For example, he labels sentence-final words in (55a–b) as adverbs and the one in (55c) as an ideophone (perhaps due to onomatopoeia).

(55) Grebo

a. *ɔ dɔda ye gblu 2 21 21 3.*

‘He sprang up **suddenly**.’

b. *ɔ ni koã nenɛɛ 333.*

‘He works (does work) **slowly**.’

c. *ɔ bide honɔ kpú 2 22 24 43.*

‘He fell down **with a bang**.’

In his dictionary of Daloa Bete, G. R. Zogbo (2005), labels many such words as adverbs as well, when in all likelihood, these are ideophones, for example as in (56).

(56) Bete (G. Zogbo 2005: 166)

a. *A mö" ghlightl.*

‘Let’s go **quickly**.’

²⁴ This distinction is notoriously difficult. McFarland (2010: 238) includes in her description of Totonac “expressive adverbials” which form the largest category of ideophones in this language. She describes this subgroup as being “structurally unusual in their reduplication, stress pattern and restricted distribution in comparison with other adverbs.” Meinhard (2015: 152) makes a clear distinction between adverbs which “directly influence the meaning of the verb or the adjective they are attached to: ‘It is *very* painful’ versus ‘*Ouch!* It is painful!’” She qualifies the latter which she qualifies as onomatopoeic but goes on to note “...the distinction is more complicated than it seems.”

- b. *"Bhugwie"* *ni* *"sibhë"* *kvla* *"mö* *"lulu*
 city-dwellers NEG bush in go IDEO
 'City dwellers **never** go into the bush.'

There is a similar skewing in the works of Vogler for Vata (1987), Saunders for Kouya (2009), Sauder & Wright (2000), Sauder (n.d.) for Krahn. But it is interesting to note that so far, in our data base of *unelicited text*, there have been no examples of ideophones and adverbs co-occurring in the same clause. This suggests that these categories have related or overlapping syntactic (and semantic) functions.

4.2.1.2. Focusing adverbial-type ideophones. Another similarity between regular adverbs and ideophones is that they use the same focusing mechanisms, i.e. fronting. Thus, in all Kru languages, adverbials (both manner and time) can be fronted for emphasis, especially when it is a question of contrastive focus. Compare (57).

(57) Godié (E)

- a. *ɔ-yi sisio / zikü.*
 'He came **quickly / today**.'
- b. *sisio / zikü ɔ-yi.*
 'It's **quickly/today** he came.'

(58) Guiberoua Bete (E)

'Lulu 'na-a nglu.
 'I don't agree at all.'

In the same way, ideophones can occur in sentence-initial position for emphasis. Innes provides multiple examples from Grebo (59)–(60).

(59) Grebo (W)

- a. *ɔ po ne ngwa fugla.*
 'He has thrown it away completely (irrevocably).'
- b. *Fugla ɔ po ne ngnwa.*
 'Irrevocably he has thrown it away.'

(60) Grebo (W)

a. *ɛ bi budu kyu.*

‘It has gone straight into the ground.’ {a=b}

b. *Kyu ɛ bi hudu.*

Though data is lacking on other Kru languages, it is important to note that in some languages at least, ideophones can occur *after* a major conjunction, but *before* the main clause (61).

(61) Tepo Kru (W)

yè fū ɔ hi ni.
and IDEO he pass FOC

‘And *fū*, he passed!’

This shows a clear dramatic function, almost equivalent to an English exclamation point. Interestingly, in one Grebo example, an ideophone occurs *before* a subordinate conjunction (62). Here the emphatic nature of the ideophone is clear.

(62) Grebo (W)

Kankan bɔ dine ɔ plene 33...
IDEO SUB-he comes he quarrels

‘Especially when he goes, he quarrels.’

4.2.1.3. Other positions for Kru adverbial-type ideophones. In at least some Kru languages, ideophones also occur between and within sentences. To date the best documentation of this phenomenon comes from Sauder & Wright’s description of Krahn (2003). Here we find ideophones occurring in positions other than clause initial or final, namely *between independent clauses*, *between subordinate and main clauses* as well as *clause internally*. Indeed, some might propose that the ideophone itself constitutes an independent sentence.

An ideophone between two independent propositions is seen in (63).²⁵

²⁵ These examples could be rather analyzed as having the ideophone preceding a main clause. It is interesting to note that in each case above (64a–c) the ideophone comes after the temporal sequential conjunction *.yee*’.

(63) Krahn (W)

ɔ da daa, **duo duo**, nyɔ :se-' 'worn.
 they call DUR **silence** person NEG hear
 ‘They called and called, but nobody answered.’

An ideophone between a subordinate and main clause is shown in (64).

(64) Krahn (W)

- a. :yeh ɔ pa-a 'de 'gbu, :yee' **glaan'**, 'keen kpon-ɔ.
 When he enter REL House then IDEO chief catch-him
 ‘When he entered the house, **immediately** they caught him.’
- b. Yeh ɔ bla-a 'kpa', :yee' **gwiaa**, ɔ-a'a: nynɔ :za 'o :kpa' weh.
 ‘When he knocked at the door, **scrape**, his wife opened the door.’
- c. :Mɔ an-a'a; nyɔ :klaba' :taa dha mu, :yee' **huu:**, on zi 'o ɔ klei' 'weh.
 ‘If their big man goes somewhere, then **rush** they rush after him.’

Ideophones occurring clause-internally are illustrated in (65).

(65) Krahn (W)

- a. An du dih, **:mu :mu :mu**, 'de :dhobo 'di.
 they beat rice IDEO IDEO IDEO REL mortar in
 ‘They are beating rice **boom boom boom**²⁶ in the mortar.’
- b. Klepeh **'gbai** on se 'chlee-deh.
 children **not-at-all** they NEG educated
 ‘Children are not **at all** educated.’

Because of their positioning and their intensifying function these ideophones resemble adverbial modifiers, but certain features (nasality, loudness and presence in exaggerated speech) make them look like ideophones.

At least some ideophones “move around” (in typical Kru fashion) like adverbs, positioning themselves *between the auxiliary and the verb*.

²⁶ Gloss mine — L.Z.

In the examples below the negative auxiliary (*ta* in (66) and *tone* in (67)) trigger this movement.

(66) Koyo (E, Kokora 1976: 70)

Yoo-o la soo Bitele ta kwlakwla nã.
 boy-DEF POSS thus Whipping NEG **at.all** be.good
 ‘The boy’s (being) whipped this way is not good **at all**.’

(67) Guiberoua Bete (E)

- a. *Yeh neneh tenyii.*
 it good very.much
 ‘it’s very good’
- b. *ɔ ɔ-ɔ tenyi ye.*
 he NEG very.much be.well
 ‘He is not well at all / He is gravely ill.’

Dingemane (2012) has noted that in some languages the more expressive a word is, the looser it is tied syntactically to elements within the clause. Though this is an area for further study, this observation seems to hold for Kru. At least impressionistically the unmarked position of ideophones acting like adverbials seems to be *clause final*. In our Glaro examples at hand, those ideophones which are “most expressive” seem to appear *clause initially*. It is as if the speaker is painting a picture before making a verbal comment (paralleling perhaps what is occurring in (61a–b)). In the following examples, though sentence initial position is usually the position of contrastive focus (Marchese 1983b), here it is *not a contrastive focus*, as a fronted adverb might be.

(68) Glaro (W)

- a. *Tèè, he sat down.* (slowly)
 b. *Vlàn the sun hit him the eyes.*
 c. *Woo, the lamp was lit.* (light appeared)
 d. *Kpaõkpaõ the sun is shining.* (hot!)
 e. *Gwlòù, the house fell down.* (sound of something large falling down, over)

Rather, it is almost as if this is a topic-comment construction so typical of Kru (Marchese 1977).²⁷

4.2. Ideophones functioning as obligatory complements

A clear second type of ideophone is one which is nominal in nature, occurring most often as object complement. In this case, there is a small class of what might be thought of as “dummy” verbs, ‘be’, ‘be at’, ‘make’ or ‘do’, which are inherently transitive, needing an object complement — a role clearly played by an ideophone! Though we have yet to find examples of this phenomena in all Kru languages, it is clearly attested in both Western and Eastern Kru (and thus in all likelihood presents a proto-Kru structure).

(69) Krahn (W, Sauder n.d.: 135)

<i>:yee'</i>	<i>en</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>'wien 'wien 'wien</i>
bells	they	do/make	ding.ding.ding
	S ²⁸	V	O

‘The bells go ding-dong, ding-dong.’

(70) Koyo (E, Kokora 1976: 63)

∅	<i>no</i>	<i>Abi</i>	<i>kapakapa</i> ²⁹ .
he	does	Abi	bad/crazy.things
S	V	INDIR	O

‘He played dirty tricks on Abi.’

²⁷ Bodomo (2006: 210–211) notes a slightly similar phenomenon in Chinese, with an ideophone being part of a topic, followed by a comment (i):

(i) *gaan1 fong2 hak1 maal maal, nei5 dim2 tai2 dou2 syul gaa3*
 CL room black IDEO IDEO 2.SG how read able book PART
 ‘This room is so dark [topic]. How can you read? [comment].’

²⁸ This and many other examples present a topic-comment construction, very common in Kru: topic ‘bells’ + comment ‘they go ding, ding, ding’.

²⁹ This form may actually be areal or regional. In Yoruba, the word *kpálakpàla* means ‘nonsense’. Though not exactly identical, the resemblance is compelling.

Some verbs appear to allow onomatopoeic ideophones as objects, for example (71).³⁰

(71) Daloa Bete (E)

Kosu gba kpáóón.

‘The gun says ‘boom’’.

(72) Krahn (W)

Bla kpəkpe, ɔ mu 'o :kpaɑ' za.

hit/say **knock** he will door open

‘Say ‘Knock’, he will open the door.’

Some of these examples, as (69) and (71), suggest perhaps a direct quote is being made (see Meinhard 2015: 152). But in other cases, the ideophone is clearly playing the role of a complement in the clause. In the Koyo example (70), *Aɓi* is the (promoted) indirect object, while the ideophone serves as the (obligatory, seemingly demoted) direct object.

Within certain languages there are clearly collocational restrictions. As Childs has rightly observed (2003: 123–124): “What little syntax ideophones have consists primarily of collocational restrictions”. In Krahn, Sauder reports particular verbs being associated with particular ideophones (73).

(73) Krahn (W)

Neh-a wan-' :jlu:jlu.

fire-INC go.out **sound.of.fire.flaring.up**

‘The fire is flaring up.’

Innes (1966: 48) also notes this feature in Grebo for some but not all ideophones. For example, within his lexicon, some ideophones are shown to co-occur with *different* verbs (74).

³⁰ Welmers (1974: 464) describes cognate object constructions in Ibo, where it would appear that ideophones act as noun objects.

(74) Grebo (W)

- a. *nu klɛũ* 2 22 ‘be stiff (of joints)’
 b. *nyena klɛũ* 223 22 ‘stand stiffly, erect’

Further research is needed to determine the extent of collocational restraints for ideophones across Kru.

On the other hand, in some languages, some Verb + Ideophone constructions show few collocational restrictions, and such construction are very productive. In Grebo, the verb *nu/no*,³¹ a transitive verb (probably ‘do’ or ‘be at’) combines with a large number of what appears to be nominal ideophones, though often the *meaning* of such expressions seems more adjectival (75).³²

(75) Grebo (W)

- nu plɔplã* ‘be mushy’
nu blɛblɛ ‘to flap (do flap movement)’
nu doee ‘be sore, ache, be tired’
no flafla ‘leaves rustle (lit. do *flafla*)’
nu sɔsɔ ‘sound as it is poured out’
nu fɔfɔ ‘to smart, sting’

Closely related is the Bassa form *nyù* + ideophone (76).

(76) Bassa (W)

- ɔ *nyùin fùà-fúá.*
 he do-me trouble
 ‘He troubled me.’

In Kru *copulas* or *locative verbs* ‘be at’ demand an NP complement, and ideophones are found in this context as well. Thus (77) below

³¹ As yet I cannot determine why sometimes *nu* and sometimes *no* appears, though a special kind of vowel harmony may be at work.

³² Some of these ideophones (e.g. *sɔsɔ*) also behave as adverbial type ideophones, yet another domain for further research.

is literally, ‘the boy is-at wickedness’, and (78a), ‘the water is at boiling’, etc.

(77) Koyo (E, Kokora 1976: 119)

yoo-o ne kapakapa.

‘The boy is wicked.’

(78) Daloa Bete (E)

a. *"Nyu-wv 'glagla.*

‘The water is boiling.’

b. *"Bhuo-wv 'yɔyɔyɔ.*

‘Everything is in disorder.’

c. *'Bagagi-wv fokofoko.*

‘The bags are very light.’

(79) Niabre Bete (E)

ɔ kv titititi.

‘She is very black.’

(80) Klao (W)

a. *ε ne bɔɔɔ.*

‘It is very red.’

b. *ε ne kpɛɛn.*

‘It is very black.’

The above examples prove the nominal nature of at least some Kru ideophones. Within various studies, researchers have at times hinted at this. While in some cases, in his Bete dictionary, G.R. Zogbo marks such words as adjective (the case of *fokofoko* above), he marks a similar word *ghlighlighli* as a noun meaning ‘agitation’. In his thesis (2009), Saunders marks the word *bidi-bidi-bidi* as a *locative* noun meaning ‘disorder’, while other ideophone-like words are labelled *adverb*. Innes (1969) marks *fodɔdo 333* as a noun meaning ‘emptiness’, while he labels *nu fodɔdo 2 333* as meaning ‘be empty’. Similarly in Grebo,

foflafofla 2121 is marked as a noun meaning ‘looting’, with *no flaflofla 2 2121* meaning ‘to do looting’. On another tone, *foflafofla 3333* is a noun referring to ‘rustling of leaves’, with *nu flaflofla 2 3333* meaning ‘make a rustling sound’.

In at least one case there seems to be almost a derivative relationship between a noun and an ideophone. In the Grebo example below, *pe* is clearly a possessed noun meaning ‘smell’ and *pee* an ideophone depicting that smell (81).

(81) Grebo (W)

ε *pe* *no* *peě* 2 2 21 22.

its odor does IDEO

‘It smells very strongly.’

4.3. Ideophones in compound words

Ideophones may be combined with other elements to produce new words, belonging to yet another grammatical class. In the following Koyo example (Kokora 1976: 16, 42) an ideophone *kapakapa* has been combined with the noun *sa* ‘way, manner’, transforming it into an adverb.³³

(82) Koyo

Doni *yi* *kapakapa* *lobe-e* *no*.

Dogni AUX.FUT badly job-DEF do

‘Dogni will do the job badly.’

Formation of compounds in Kru would allow interpretation of the ideophone as either a noun or verb (in which case one would expect reduplication, as in Godié *bhlä-bhlä-nyɔ* [kill-kill-person] ‘murderer’).

³³ In some African languages (e.g. Yoruba) adverbs are closely associated to and/or derived from nouns. In Kru, the morpheme *sa* in other contexts functions as a noun ‘way’. One could even propose the adverb in this example comes from a construction meaning literally ‘the way of foolishness’.

Interestingly the above example shows that there is a distinction between an ideophone and an adverb.

4.4. Ideophones acting as verbs

Noss (1986) notes for Gbaya that ideophones often act as verbs. This does not seem like a regular feature of Kru ideophones. But at least one case has been identified in Grebo. In (83), no “true verb” is present, while the ideophone *plāplā* (sound of rice dropping) functions as a predicate.

(83) Grebo

Ble plāplā 33.

rice IDEO

‘The rice fell.’ (sound of rice falling)

I suspect that this can happen in other Kru languages, but data is lacking, again underlining how difficult it is to elicit and document such forms.

4.5. Ideophones vs interjections

I have hinted that some ideophones seem to overlap with or function as members of other grammatical classes such as adverb, noun or verb. Several researchers (Welmers 1973; Finnegan 1976) have also noted that some ideophones seem part of or closely related to the class called “interjections”. This is an interesting issue, since like ideophones, interjections play an expressive or performative role in speech. Indeed, G.R. Zogbo (2005) in his dictionary of Daloa Bete as well as Grah (1983) in her description of Neyo at times label what we would call ideophones “interjections”. It is true that these two word-classes or categories share some features. Like ideophones, interjections express strong emotion, produce a certain impact and share some phonological features identified with ideophones. Thus, exclamations or interjections may be pronounced in an exaggerated manner or with a much louder voice than other words in the immediate context.

(84) Neyo (Grah 1983: 296)

yíí

‘surprise!’

In some languages, non-phonemic sounds occur also in interjections. Thus, in Godié below (85), an *h* is clearly heard in the following interjection, though not being part of the phonological inventory of this language, cf. Guiberoua Bete *yeee-ke!*

(85) Godié

hɛɛkɛɛ

‘What! Wow!’

However, despite these similarities, in Kru interjections seem to represent *a separate grammatical category*. Taking a simple Merriam-Webster.com (2022) definition for this word class, interjections can be seen as:³⁴

- an ejaculatory utterance usually lacking grammatical connection: such as
- a: a word or phrase used in exclamation (such as *Heavens! Dear me!*)
- b: a cry or inarticulate utterance (such as *Alas! ouch! phooey! ugh!*)
expressing an emotion

Both types of interjections exist in Kru. For example, in Daloa Bete, an expression "*nyiabehui* ‘friend of my mother’, is roughly equivalent to the English expression *Oh my God!* (G.R. Zogbo 2005). In Godié, dialogue in folktales is often filled with interjections, which seem to be more frequent than ideophones. In his detailed dictionary of Grebo, Innes (1969) makes a careful (and I believe correct) distinction between the two categories.

Though more research needs to be done, it would appear these interjections and ideophones indeed represent *distinct grammatical categories* within Kru.

³⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/interjection>

For the time being, I propose that ideophones exist as a separate grammatical class, uninflected, often distinguished by reduplication and unusual phonological and phonetic features, often isolated or loosely linked to a clause, but at times behaving as a noun complement or verb. Though close to adverbs and interjections, ideophones appear to be a separate grammatical category.³⁵

5. Semantic range of ideophones in Kru

As noted above, Doke (1935) defined an ideophone as “a vivid representation of an idea in sound”. He went on to speak of “...a word, often onomatopoeic, which describes a predicate, qualificative or adverb in respect to *manner, colour, smell, action, state or intensity*” (quoted in Welmers 1973: 118). Dingemanse (2012) notes ideophones “*take in information from the outside world through sensory modalities, of which...there are five: vision, hearing, touch, taste and smell*”. Though according to Bodomo (2007: 207), some researchers claim that ideophones lack “independent semantics” or have little or no meaning (depending “on adjacent words and other contexts for their meaning”, he and many linguists would argue *they do indeed have meaning*, even if gaining components of meaning from their context.

In what follows I attempt to present ideophones in what seem to be the most common semantic categories found across the Kru family. Following Dingemanse (2012), I present them in groupings related to the five senses, more or less in their order of frequency as they appear in our current data base.³⁶ Most frequent in Kru seems aural, i.e. *sound*-related ideophones followed by *visual* ones, which include a very wide variety of semantic properties: color, brightness, size, position, movement, as well as *temporally*-related ideophones seemingly related

³⁵ It may be possible that grammatical class and behavior of ideophones may vary *between individual Kru languages*, an area for further research.

³⁶ Examples are representative. Many more examples could be given from other languages, but I reduced examples due to limitations of time and space.

to movement ideophones. *Perceptive/evaluative* ideophones, involving notions of quantity, completeness could be *visual*, but also cover other senses such as smell and taste. Finally, I consider ideophones which deal with more *conceptual-cognitive* notions and what I consider *pragmatic-discourse* functions.

Certainly, more research needs to be done as more data becomes available. Nevertheless, determining what semantic categories are salient and pertinent in ideophones gives some clue as to cognitive categorization and world view in this specific language family and ethnic group.

5.1. Ideophones depicting sounds

I have already shown that a great many Kru ideophones are in fact onomatopoeic, i.e. imitating or evoking sound in the real world. For the languages where I have data, this seems to be the largest category. Impressionistically, it would seem that more ideophones refer to *loud noises* (bangs, guns going off, thunder rolling) than softer sounds, as in (86).

(86) Grebo (W)

- pã* 3 ‘sound of a sharp blow’
tu 3 ‘fall of a large object with a crash, a loud noise’
pãpã 22 ‘loud scream’

However, in a number of languages (so far Western), there are multiple ideophones depicting *sounds water makes*: gushing, splashing, one drop of water falling at a time, etc.

(87) Grebo (W)

- a. *tiq* ‘of diving without a big splash’
hɔɔ ‘of liquid gushing out profusely’
Ni wede fo ngwonɔ hɔɔ 2 22 2 21 33.
 ‘Water is pouring out of the hole.’
- b. *suu* 33 ‘of the sound of falling water with a splash’
ε wɔdε ne suu 2 22 1 33.
 ‘It has split with a splash.’

- c. *ta 3* ‘of liquid falling, one drop at a time’
ε tε ne ta 22 13.
 ‘One drop has fallen.’

There are also some more “exotic” ideophones, with word relating to sounds not recognized by a Western ear such as, for example, the sound of rice pouring out of a sack.

- (88) Grebo (W)
ɔsɔ 33 ‘of trembling, shivering, sound of rice or sand being poured out’

Interestingly in at least some Kru languages, there is an ideophone which depicts silence.³⁷

- (89) Southern Guéré (W)
ɔ se glu gbluun.
 ‘He said nothing.’³⁸

- (90) Daloa Bete (E)
Gbě-wv blenyi.
 ‘The village is really calm (lit. at calm).’

See also Krahn examples above (63) and (65a).

5.2. Ideophones relating to visual phenomena

Besides sound-related ideophones, the next largest category of ideophones in Kru seems to involve visual phenomena, including a number of subcategories.³⁹ So far it would seem that all Kru languages

³⁷ This is also reported by Noss (1988; 2001) for Gbaya.

³⁸ Here we may see a sound correspondence, as the back rounded vowel *u* is associated with silence.

³⁹ I have not yet been able to work on ideophonic antonyms which constitutes yet another area for further research.

have ideophones related to the three principal color distinctions (white, red and black), as well as to brightness. Most also appear to have ideophones for perceived movement, as well as for size, position, direction and quantity.

5.2.1. Ideophones related to color and brightness

In all the Kru languages the primary colors are black, white and red.⁴⁰ Though lacking some data, there are forms which might be re-constructable for proto-Kru and which may qualify as ideophones (91).

(91) ‘black’: **jrùjrù*

Western		Eastern	
Glaro	<i>jru</i>	Daloa Bete	<i>jrùjrù</i>
Bakwe	<i>jrurju</i>		

There is also an alternate form for ‘black’ (92).

(92) ‘black’: **bli*

Western		Eastern	
Gueré	<i>bibli</i>	Daloa Bete	<i>-bibli</i> ⁴¹

For the Grebo complex on the west, there are other re-constructable forms (93).

(93) ‘black’: **kpeen*

Grebo	<i>kpeηkpeη</i>
Klao	<i>kpeen</i>

For ‘white’, we can also see some evidence for a proto form in (94).

⁴⁰ Kouya may also have an ideophone for ‘purple’, but this appears to be borrowed.

⁴¹ Cf. Niabre *tittiti*.

(94) ‘white’: **puuu* or **buuu*

Western		Eastern	
Guere	<i>puuuuuuu</i>	Daloa Bete	<i>buun</i>
Grebo	<i>puuuuuuu</i>		
Bassa	<i>puúúúúúú</i> ⁴²		

The root **pUpV* is also attested in both Western and Eastern Kru, as in Vata *pópépópé* ‘very white’ and Glaro *The moon is shining popo* ‘brightly’.

For the color red, the forms in hand are far more divergent (95).

(95) ‘red’

Western		Eastern	
Guere	<i>greeeeee</i>	Daloa Bete	<i>Zaazaa</i>
Grebo	<i>gbɔgbɔ</i>		
Klao	<i>bɔɔɔ</i>		

This data is compelling because many of these color words look like ideophones due to their reduplication and the long vowels expressing intensity. More research needs to be carried out to determine what relationship exists between color words and ideophones. It is perhaps too early to speculate on historical developments, whether ideophones gave rise to adjectival verbs and adjectives or certain adjectival verbs gave rise to ideophones.⁴³

In many languages, ideophones are used to signal brightness:

(96) Godié (E)

pírrí ‘shining bright’

(97) Klao (W)

paaaa ‘very bright (light shining in a darkened area)’

⁴² Cf. Klao *paoon*.

⁴³ Ameke (2001: 43) notes for Ewe that curiously two main colors, white and red, are adjectives, but black qualifies as an ideophone.

(98) Grebo (W)

- pea* 33 ‘sparkling brightly’
boo 22 ‘brightly, glowingly’

(99) Glaro (W)

- a. *Vlùàn* *the sun hit him the eyes.*
 b. *Woo*, *the lamp was lit.* ‘light appeared’
 c. *Kpaðkpað* *the sun is shining.* ‘hot!’
 d. *Her body is wlà wlà.* ‘shines’

These examples illustrate the diversity of forms expressing similar semantic notions, a point we will return to below.

5.2.2. Ideophones related to perceived movement and position

It would appear that all Kru languages have ideophones for movement, at least for basic notions such as ‘fast’, ‘slow’, ‘in a flash’. I will include here notions of quickness and slowness, which seem *temporal* as well as *visual* (and at times *aural*).

5.2.2.1. Speed of action. Many or all Kru languages have ideophones evoking very quick actions.

(99) Grebo (W)

- a. *peañ* 21 ‘of passing in a flash’
 b. *pedo* 21 ‘of passing in a flash, very quickly’
 c. *kya* 21 ‘of biting suddenly’

Sidè mlina nɔ nne kya.

‘The snake bit him suddenly.’

(100) Krahn (W)

- glaan'* ‘all of a sudden’

(101) Glaro (W)

- a. *Vò*, *the car passed by*. ‘with speed’
- b. *Tèè*, *he sat down*. ‘slowly’
- c. *Puèen* *he left*. ‘rapidly’
- d. *Plí* *his eyes were opened*. ‘suddenly’

5.2.2.2. Ideophones related to perceived space, position, or direction. In Kru languages, there are many ideophones designating various features of physical space: openness, direction, or physical dimension.

Ideophones related to direction are illustrated in (102).

(102) Grebo (W)

- a. *É nedu yuu konakona* 22 2 21 2222.
‘It is high in the sky.’
- b. *É bi hudu kyu* 3 22 32.
‘It has gone straight into the ground.’

Ideophones relating to open space are illustrated in (103).

(103) Krahn (W)

An-a: *gle* *:ne* *ken* *dih* ***bhou!***
I-POSS farm is all around **open**
‘My field is clear, wide open!’

Ideophones related to body position are illustrated in (104).

(104) Grebo (W)

pituu 333 ‘outstretched’
padaba 333 ‘of sitting on the floor with legs stretched out in front’

There are also many ideophones depicting “gaits” of animals and humans and movements of various types: steady walking, flapping wings (105).

(105) Grebo (W)

bleble or *bleble* 33 ‘with a flapping motion’

plapla 2121 ‘of fidgeting’

tōō 33 ‘of steady movement’

kyokyō 2121 ‘darting movement of the eyes darting’

kyudu 33 ‘of jumping remaining on feet (balance)’

5.3. Ideophones relating to evaluative notions

This is perhaps a conflated category but involves a person undergoing a sensory effect (smell or temperature) or evaluating something perceived (weight).

As for ideophones relating to smell, to date I have found very few ideophones relating to odor or taste, but this could simply be due to lack of data.⁴⁴

(106) Grebo (W)

peē 22 ‘very pungent’

As for ideophones relating to temperature, in Kru, this appears to be a fairly robust category.

(107) Grebo (W)

toto 33 ‘fairly hot’

(108) Klao (W)

seaoh 33 ‘hot’

(109) Glaro (W)

a. *Kpaōkpaō* *the sun is shining.* ‘hot!’

b. *The water is cold s̀v̀ìn.*

c. *The water is hot z̀l̀à z̀l̀à.* ‘boiling, extremely hot’

⁴⁴ Note that however in Didinga of Eastern Sudan, de Jong (2001: 126) also notes a scarcity of ideophones related to touch, smell, and taste.

5.4. Ideophones with conceptual-pragmatic functions

Many ideophones have nothing to do with a sound being evoked or visual phenomena. Rather these provide *cognitive* or emotional impressions or remarks. One possible example comes from Grebo which seems to combine a visual notion with an emotional perception/evaluation (110).

(110) Grebo (W)
kyɔku 22 ‘of grabbing violently’

A related category of ideophones demands a kind of *cognitive evaluation* of a phenomenon.

5.4.1. Ideophones related to ideas of completeness or orderliness

In many languages, ideophones are used to express completeness.

(111) Godié (E)
kwálákwálá ‘completely (finished)’⁴⁵

(112) Krahn (W)
‘kpan kpan ‘completely, packed (no room left)’

(113) Glaro (W)
 a. *All is money is finished mí mí.* ‘completely, absolutely nothing left’
 b. *Miáán his money is finished.* ‘nothing left’

(114) Grebo (W)
É sea do ne suasua 2 22 1 3333.
 ‘It has completely defeated Do.’

The idea of disorder is also expressed by an ideophone (115).

(115) Koyo (E)
kapakapa ‘disorderly, crazy’⁴⁶

⁴⁵ This form seems re-constructable for part of Eastern Kru or could be areal.

⁴⁶ Cf. Ivorian French *wariwari*.

5.4.2. Ideophones that have wide, even metaphorical uses

While some ideophones have collocational constraints, depending on the verb in the clause, impressionistically it seems many more have a much wider distribution, being used in a wide variety of semantic contexts. For example, in Grebo, the same word *fufu* 33 used to evoke a strong wind is applied to cars which are passing by swiftly (116).

(116) Grebo (W)

a. *Duu yudu hi ne fufu.*

‘The passing wind is strong.’

b. *Mɔtia hi ne fufu.*

‘Cars are passing quickly.’

Ideophones can in fact be used and understood *in a metaphoric way*. It would appear in Grebo that an ideophone associated with a fierce wind (*hauu* 222) is used to express or depict rage or vehement anger. In this same language, an ideophone used to evoke the sound of metal falling to the ground, *gbākanana*, may also be used to express rage. And perhaps unexpectedly, the ideophone associated with the sound of rain (or Innes (1969) says snow!) falling (*gblagbla* 33) can be used to express a certain fussiness.

(117) Grebo (W)

ɔ *hle be gblagbla.*

‘She talks vigorously / She is fussy.’

In Daloa Bete, a word for “boiling hot”, rather than expressing anger as in many languages (English, Hebrew), can be used to describe a zealous, enthusiastic person (118).

(118) Daloa Bete

a. *"nyu-wv 'glagla.*

‘The water is boiling.’

b. *Tape-wv-li "bhuokpö "mō-glagla 44.*

‘Tape is zealous in all.’

G. R. Zogbo (2005: 259) also notes that a word in the negative which means ‘wobbly’ (as describing a chair) can be used for a spoiled or capricious child. In Kouya, what Saunders (2009) calls an adjectival word, *suaa* ‘soft’, in its longer nasalized form [sūāāāā] can describe not only calm water, but also a calm person. Clearly examining such uses is very fertile area for further research which can contribute significantly to the understanding of “poetics” within this (and any) language family.

5.5. A semantic hierarchy?

In his broad study of ideophones around the world, Dingemanse (2012) has established a hierarchy to predict certain facts about semantic domains covered by ideophones. He proposes an *ideophone continuum* whereby he predicts which ideophones are most basic in a given language. If a language has ideophones in one category on the continuum, he claims it will have ideophones in all the other categories listed before (preceding) it (i).

- (i) SOUND
 - < MOVEMENT
 - < VISUAL PATTERNS
 - < OTHER SENSORY PERCEPTIONS
 - < INNER FEELINGS & COGNITIVE STATES

Comparing these initial findings with this hierarchy, our first observation is that in our data (which may not be complete), while very few ideophones in Kru would qualify as *inner feelings*, certainly Dingemanse’s hierarchy holds. A true *cognitive* category seems robust, and indeed, all the preceding categories are attested.

6. Discourse and pragmatic uses of ideophones

We have seen that ideophones may act grammatically as qualifiers, quantifiers, nouns and on rare occasions, even verbs. Though occurring

most frequently in everyday speech and exchanges, ideophones appear to play a special role in monologues or narrative texts (folktales, histories, personal narratives), told by one person to a small or large audience. These include personal narratives, historical accounts, folktales, riddles, etc. Though this part of our research is in its initial stages,⁴⁷ in this environment ideophones are relatively rare, yet they seem to be *carefully chosen and placed*, obviously playing crucial roles in discourse.⁴⁸

By examining transcripts of natural oral texts, ideophones can be seen to play, not just one, but a number of discourse roles.

Depending on speaker and genre, the most common ideophones are “sound-words” which enliven and very often bring humor to a story. Thus, in a Godié folktale (in this case an etiological story, explaining why Woodpecker “pecks”), ideophones (here onomatopoeic forms) bring a humoristic touch. In this story, God has convinced Woodpecker that he can marry the woman of his dreams (the daughter of God) if he can bring down a certain number of trees in the forest. His first trip out: *a² nv² ko² ko² ko² ko²* ‘he makes/goes knock-knock-knock’, with an onomatopoeic ideophone. There are several cycles as God sends Woodpecker back again and again to keep pecking. At the end of the story, we hear *kōrrrr²*, the repeated sound of poor Woodpecker whose task is never, ever finished (and whose wife is never won).

In studying ideophones in such texts, it is important to understand not only their meaning and expressive effect but also their position and

⁴⁷ I am basing these observations on recording of spontaneous oral narrative texts very carefully transcribed by seasoned researchers, including 15 Godie texts (Gratrix and Marchese), 1 Bassa folktale (Slager), 3 Nyabwa texts (Wilson), 3 Bakwe texts (Leidenfrost), 1 Bete of Guibéroua text (Werle), and 1 anonymous Guere text.

⁴⁸ Finnegan (1976: 64–66) hints at this in her description of ideophones in languages across Africa, particularly Bantu, noting that they are “used by accomplished speakers with an artistic sense ...”, especially expressing “vividness” in “dramatic passages”. Noss (2001: 260) notes the important role ideophones play in Gbaya folktales (Cameroon).

role/function in a given discourse. In a Bassa folktale about Blackbird (and why blackbirds have white eggs and not black), there are only two ideophones. The first occurs at a very precise place in the narrative. Blackbird has been told by Country Doctor that if she wants to have white eggs, she must stop eating her favorite dish: black termites. The suspense builds through many lines as Blackbird tries to do what Doctor says, but then suddenly Blackbird, who can bear it no longer, sees the termites flying toward her: *bìdii-bìdì bìdì-bìdì* ‘buzzzz’. This ideophone appears one step away from (or right at) story climax. Then when Blackbird swallows the termites, we hear *cá*, which certainly marks the high point, indeed, the *downfall* of Blackbird.

In a Godié story about Viper and Eagle, there is again only one ideophone, but as in Bassa, it occurs at story climax. Here Eagle, in an attempt to pay back Viper for ‘stealing’ his wife, sweeps down *Vuum!* to attack Eagle (Marchese n.d.).

In one Nyabwa folktale about Panther and Gazelle, there is again only one ideophone, which is also placed where it plays a special discourse role. As the story unfolds about two characters building on the same plot of land, an ideophone occurs as suspense builds, before Gazelle gets to the key spot of construction.

(119) *É mu'a kplokplokplo.*

‘He (Gazelle) traveled for a long time.’

This ideophone adds humor to the story, as we see to what extent Gazelle goes to find a good spot to construct his house. As in Bassa, this ideophone draws the story out, occurring *before* a very pertinent action which will impact the rest of the story. In another Nyabwa folktale (how disagreements came into the world), there is again only one ideophone, and it occurs as part of the *mise-en-scène*, ie. the setting up of conflict.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Interestingly the ideophone occurs at the end of a sentence, which begins with a repetitive subordinate repeating the previous clause: “... He appeared in the

In many stories, then it would appear the ideophone marks a high point either *prior* or *at climax*. Its use stands out, at times slowing down the action, building suspense, compelling the audience's attention before something significant occurs, and at times signaling a quick high point.⁵⁰

Another important use of ideophones in discourse is *structural*. In Gbāwāl, an ideophone is part of a *story opener*. In Koyo repetitive ideophones signal the storyteller is about to step into a make believe world (Kokora, p.c.). In Godie, at least one storyteller likes to end his stories by an ideophonic *conclusion marker*.⁵¹

(120) *Naa, kákükü a-kä-bli wä kv'*

'Now, **end!** It (story) has ended (lit. it has fallen down).'

Many Godié speakers mark the end of a story unit with an ideophone followed by a particle *ooo* (121).

(121) *Lɔ n bli kwálákwálá oooo.*

'There I stop **it's the end oooo.**'

This latter expression occurs at the end of a formulaic greeting "ceremony" after "telling the news", an important part of Godie ritual. *kwálákwálá oooo* can thus be seen as a marker of conclusion, but also as a trigger for the listener to take up his or her "speech turn".

middle of the village. When he appeared in the village, he looked straight ahead (*ükili*)".

⁵⁰ This is a nice example of what Longacre calls "zones of turbulence", which cluster around story climax, here applied earlier in the story at a significant development in the story. After our analysis was finished, I was happy to find confirmation of similar uses of ideophones in de Jong's analysis of Didinga, an Eastern Sudanese language. She notes (2001: 128) ideophones marking pre-peak, climax and outcome, very close to what I have found in Kru.

⁵¹ Noss (2001: 260) also notes ideophones marking beginning and end of discourse, especially in folktales in Gbaya.

To sum up, while somewhat surprisingly in Kru ideophones are not frequent in what we would call narrative discourse, when they do occur, they play *crucial roles in discourse*, signaling beginning and end of discourse, as well as marking specifically relevant points in the narrative (actions moving toward story climax, story climax itself, or direct consequence of story climax).⁵² Again this is an area which clearly merits more research.

7. A note on the origins and distribution of ideophones

Welmers (1973) suggests ideophones occur in all Niger-Congo languages, leading us to ask if such forms go back to Proto-Niger Congo and logically to Proto Kru. The widespread prevalence of ideophones across the Kru family suggests the answer is ‘yes’, but the lack of matching re-constructible ideophones poses a problem for such analyses. To date, I have found only very few “matches”, relating to color and a few other shared forms.⁵³ Given the difficulty in eliciting ideophones, it may be some time before any substantial number of “proto-forms” can be identified. On the other hand, we must also admit that the number of ideophones which are *unique*, i.e. *language-specific*, and even *dialect-specific*, in Kru is impressive,⁵⁴ and leads to the idea that many ideophones may be created spontaneously.⁵⁵

⁵² Noss (2001: 268) notes for Gbaya: “Ideophones are used in Gbaya oral art in the same way that they are used in daily speech, except perhaps more consciously because they enter into the process that they Gbaya call ‘fixing the tale’”. Noss also notes that ideophones seem more frequent in folktales than in songs. For Kru this remains an area for further research.

⁵³ Beyond those cited earlier, I note that the word *kaaaa* (from French *jusqu’à*), which acts at times like an ideophone is attested across the Kru language family, both in conversational exchange and more structured oral texts.

⁵⁴ The language specific-ness of ideophones has been pointed out by Childs (2019: 303)

⁵⁵ This is a position taken by Childs (2001) and also noted by Innes for Grebo (1964) who claims that “New ideophones are sometimes coined by a story teller,

Concerning the frequency of ideophones in Kru (use and number of items in a given lexicon), it must be noted Kru languages contrast with those ideophone-dominant languages found further east, in Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and Tchad. Indeed, languages like Lele, Gbeya, and Gbaya count ideophones *in the thousands*, with ideophones occurring in all discourse types and communication events, including song.

Concerning the *origin* of ideophones, adjectival verbs as well as adverbs may be a likely source, via reduplication. Compare (122) and (123).

(122) Vata (E)

- a. *pɔpɛ'* 'white' *pɔpɛpɔpɛ'* 'very white'
 bùlú 'long' *bùlúbùlú* 'very long'

(123) Daloa Bete (E, G. Zogbo 2005: 141⁵⁶)

- "*kö* 'to be bitter'
 "*kökökö* 'very bitter'

But there may be several avenues for development with ideophones giving birth to certain nouns and verbs (or vice-versa), and truly it seems too early to draw any conclusions for Kru.

Are ideophones in Kru subject to areal distribution? I have found little data up till now that this is the case. Childs (2003: 308) notes "Areality is the rule rather than the exception in Africa... but ideophones are highly local". Further he notes, quoting (Huttar 1986): "...Ideophones are notoriously difficult to document in any historical depth" (Childs 2003: 309).

and the coining of striking and appropriate ideophones is regarded as one of the marks of a skilled narration."

⁵⁶ Labelled an adjective, the triplicated form is clearly an ideophone.

8. Conclusion

Documentation on ideophones in the Kru language family, “those words that are such fun to use” (Welmers 1973: 474), is scarce and spotty. Despite this challenge, in this paper I have attempted to share initial observations drawn from a very limited data base, hoping that, with time, others can follow to “fill in the blanks”.

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Abbreviations

AUX – auxiliary	FOC – focus	PART – particle
CL – classifier	FUT – future	POSS – possessive
CN – connective	IDEO – ideophone	REL – relativizer
DEF – definite marker	INC – incomplete	SG – singular
DEM – demonstrative	LOC – locative	SUB – subordinate
DUR – durative	NEG – negation	W – Western Kru
E – Eastern Kru		

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